District Review Report

School District No. 60 (Peace River North)

April 18 - 21, 2004

Submitted to the Minister of Education

By District Review Team Chair
Bendina Miller, Superintendent, School District No. 6 (Rocky Mountain)

District Review Report

2003/2004

District Name:	Peace River North
District Number:	60
Superintendent:	Ron Samborski
Date of Visit:	April 18-21, 2004
Team Chair:	Bendina Miller, Superintendent, SD 6 (Rocky Mountain)
Team Members:	Veronica Barlee, Ministry of Education Ivano Cecchini, Educator, SD 43 (Coquitlam) DeDe DeRose, Principal, SD 73 (Kamloops) Christine Foster, Director of Instruction, SD 82 (Coast Mountains) Hattie Hogeterp, Parent, SD 35 (Langley) Elizabeth Milne, Director of Instruction, SD79 (Cowichan Valley) William Reid, Director of Instruction, SD 8 (Kootenay Lake)

Context

School District No. 60 (Peace River North) is located in Northeastern British Columbia in a region that enjoys a prosperous and expanding economy based upon oil and gas, hydroelectric power, agriculture, forestry, tourism and services. There are just under 5,800 students in the district including 929 of Aboriginal descent. There is some transience in the student population as parents follow their jobs. School size ranges from two-room rural to a large senior secondary. A range of school configurations is used to meet the needs of the various communities. The majority of the students and schools are in the City of Fort St. John with other facilities located in surrounding communities such as Hudsonâs Hope, Taylor, Baldonnel, and Charlie Lake.

The District has a diverse student population including Aboriginal students (18 %) as well as ESL students. The District has a variety of programs such as French Immersion, Distance Education, Aboriginal Support, Open Learning and a Fine Arts School.

Schools are generally well equipped with access to modern technology. The District has a strong focus on ongoing staff development.

Summary of Process

The Team met Sunday afternoon to review the process, re-examine previously distributed school information, determine assignments, assign meetings, and schedule future meetings. On Sunday evening, the team had a get-acquainted dinner with trustees and senior management.

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On Monday, a presentation by District Management gave an overview of the District and the important aspects of the accountability contract. Trustees, district staff, principals and vice-principals, Peace River North Teachersd Association, District Parent Advisory Council, and the local media attended the meeting. The presentation was followed by visit s to the first set of schools. The Team divided into three groups to visit six sites.

In the late afternoon, the Team re-distributed itself into two groups to meet with the District Parent Advisory Council and the First Education Nations Advisory Council.

A whole-team meeting to review the dayd s events followed those meetings. On Tuesday, the team divided into three teams again and visited nine school sites.

The following schools were visited:

Alwin Holland, Bert Ambrose, Buick Creek, Charlie Lake, Duncan Cran, Robert Ogilvie, Taylor, Upper Pine Elementary schools, Clearview Elementary-Junior Secondary, Bert Bowes Junior Secondary, Dr. Kearney Junior Second ary, Hudsond s Hope Elementary Secondary, Ld Ecole Central School of the Arts, Key Learning Center, North Peace Senior Secondar y.

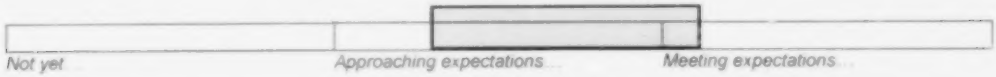
The team appreciated the warm welcome in the district sites and the opportunity to meet a committed and dedicated group of educators, students and parents.

Observations in Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. *Goals:*
   Improving districts and schools have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in relevant goals for improving achievement for all students.

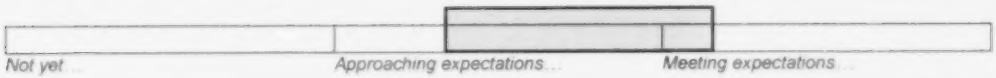
- District goals were developed using school goals.
- There are a large number of district goals which reflect an ambitious focus on improved student achievement.
- Many school goals are clearly focused on improving student achievement.

2. *Rationale:*
Improving districts and schools have a thorough and connected set of reasons, **based on evidence**, for the selection of their student achievement goals.



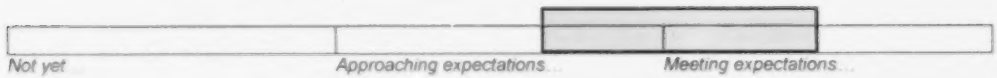
- District goals are many and broad.
- Some Principals felt the process of setting goals was not iterative.
- A number of schools used their most recent accreditation experience to assist them in establishing goals.
- Several schools are beginning to collect and use data to inform their goal development.
- Some schools did not have a clear set of reasons for their goal choices.

3. *Data:*
Improving districts and schools are actively considering at least three sources of evidence including classroom, school, district and provincial data. The analysis of this evidence informs the selection of the district goals and is used to monitor progress.



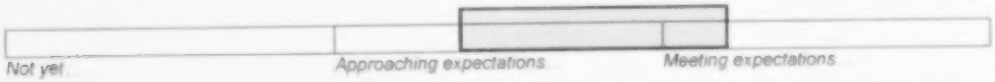
- The District has a well-established system of central data collection, primarily in the area of early literacy.
- The schools are collecting provincial and district data, and recognize the need to explore authentic classroom data.
- Schools and the District are engaged in meaningful discussion around the gathering, selection, and use of data to support improved student achievement.
- Some schools are collecting too much data.

4. *Strategies:*
Improving districts and schools have well-organized, focused improvement plans in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.



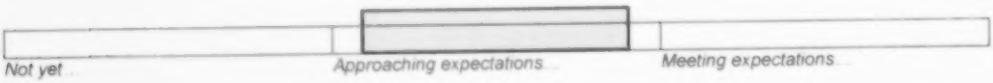
- The School District has selected appropriate and well-supported strategies to improve student literacy. Strategies to improve numeracy are formative and not yet fully developed.
- There is innovation, excitement and ownership in the District and schools around the development and implementation of strategies.
- Some schools' strategies are not strongly linked to data.
- Staff development is clearly evident in the District.
- There is a wide variety of practical and innovative strategies that are supported by the District.

5. *Structures*:
Improving districts and schools have aligned structures – resources, time, organizations – to get the results they want. This includes, but is not limited to, effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.



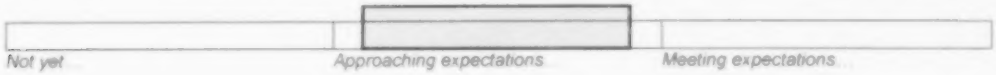
- The Board is focused on improving student achievement and committed to change by providing leadership and support.
- There are many promising practices at the implementation stage in the District.
- Most schools are beginning to demonstrate methods of collaboration or are exploring ways to facilitate opportunities for collaboration.
- Educator coaching and mentoring is evident and supports improved instructional practice.
- Several schools have allocated additional resources to support student achievement through site-based decision-making.
- The District is starting preliminary discussion about potential grade-level restructuring to better meet the needs of students in the new graduation program.

6. *Results*:
Improving districts and schools get improved results – at the classroom, school and district levels.



- Many schools are at the initial stages of analyzing school data, monitoring results, and making adjustments to improve student achievement.
- Schools are consistently using Performance Standards to monitor student progress in writing.
- The method of choosing targets varies by school.
- The District and many school targets are ambitious for a one-year growth period.
- The Team recognizes that there is difficulty at some sites in setting goals with percentage targets due to small cohorts.

7. *Communication*:
Improving districts and schools are involved in continuous dialogue about student achievement and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made in specific areas of focus.

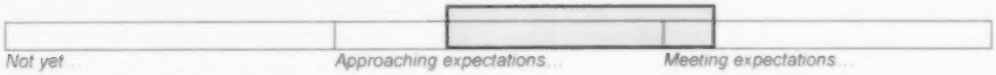


- There is not a consistent, district-wide approach to communicating with all partner groups about student achievement, including the Aboriginal community.
- Schools use many traditional methods of communications for distributing information.
- Efforts are being made to have more two-way communication.
- Internal communications are generally quite effective in the District.
- Goals are shared between schools and within the District, and it is resulting in a meaningful dialogue.

8. *Teamwork – District and School Coherence*:
Improving districts and schools have an interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and school district directions are both valued.

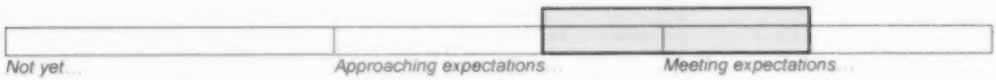
- Board meetings are held in schools, presentation are done by students and staff in the schools, demonstrating connection between the Board and schools.
- There is communication around the development of the school plans and schools generally feel supported in this work.
- Schools develop unique goals in recognition and celebration of their distinct identities.
- Aboriginal staff involvement in the development of the district accountability contract is not clearly evident.
- The District is continuing to develop the process of its interactive strategies for connecting school and district goals.
- Administrators meet to discuss school and district plans and share strategies.
- School goals set the general district direction.

9. *Teamwork – District and Parent Involvement*:
Improving districts and schools work as a team with parents, including specific groups of parents, to improve student achievement.



- Parents are actively involved in many schools.
- Parent involvement in decision-making regarding goal setting and student achievement is not clearly evident in all schools.
- Some schools have an active and engaged School Planning Council.
- The training sessions for members of the School Planning Council were well received.
- Aboriginal parent involvement in the development of the district accountability contract is not evident.
- The relationship between parents and school staff is positive and supportive.

10. *Leadership / Teamwork*:
Leaders in improving districts and schools have a clear vision for, and commitment, to improving achievement for all students. Leadership at all levels, in all roles, is encouraged and systematically developed in a collaborative learning community with a focus on improving student achievement.



- District leaders' vision of and commitment to the improvement of student achievement is clear.
- District leaders clearly work as a team to implement the vision.
- The District staff development structure has provided numerous opportunities for staff.
- There is ample evidence of shared leadership in both district and schools.
- Opportunities exist for student, parent, teacher, and administrative leadership.

Strengths

Team observations of particular strengths related to student achievement:

- The pride held by the District in its rural schools and the responsiveness to the needs of those students.
- A committed parent community.
- The dedication, passion, and commitment of staff to the individual needs of students.
- The District level early literacy data collection and use of the data to focus efforts.
- The District commitment to leading-edge staff development as exemplified by the following educational researchers: Lipton, Wellman, Carbol, Dufour, Van De Wal le group etc.
- The efforts on behalf of children with unique behavioural needs.
- The School Planning Council input at several schools is commendable.
- The efforts to place courses on-line and support small schools.
- The partnership with Northern Lights College and the Northern Opportunities Council provides unique opportunities to students in the district.
- Project Heavy Duty gives secondary students a special opportunity to be exposed to alternate career paths.
- The strong apprenticeship program.
- Several schools support the social responsibility goal by sending quickscales home to parents.
- There is a range of educational choices within the district.
- Schools reach out to involve parents in a variety of innovative ways, including: hosting BBQs, dances, reunions, Books for Breakfast, literacy nights. Several schools use email to communicate with parents.
- Doig Days: an Aboriginal culture day in May during which all Grade 4 students visit the Reserve to learn about Aboriginal culture and tradition.

Promising Practices

The Team noted the following promising practices:

- Wireless Writing: an innovative strategy to improve student writing by providing a wireless computer to every Grade 6 and 7 student in the district.
- Based on research, the District supports improved instructional practice by providing experiential learning opportunities i.e. ˇlearning by doingˆ. As part of this approach the District has realigned structures to provide release time for both coaches and learners to implement ˇbalanced literacyˆ.
- ˇS.O.Sˆ or ˇSave One Studentˆ: a staff member works with a vulnerable student to develop a relationship and provide support when needed.

Recommendations

The External Team recommends that the District implement the following recommendations in the following areas:

GOAL SETTING AND DATA LITERACY

- reduce and prioritize district goals.
- ensure the thoughtful selection and consistent use of data in all schools to set clear and specific goals to support student achievement.

ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

- work in partnership with Aboriginal communities to develop an Enhancement Agreement to support Aboriginal student achievement.
- encourage deeper understanding of local Aboriginal hist ory and culture for all students and staff.

COMMUNICATION

- develop more two-way dialogue with partner groups.

The Team has confidence in the work of the District and its ability to improve student achievement.

There are no areas in need of immediate attention.